

THE POWER OF CONSCIOUS BREATHING

HOW OUR BREATH
CHANGES EVERYTHING



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The Power of Conscious Breathing: How our Breath Changes Everything.

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INTRODUCTION

Think what our bodies would be like if they could defy gravity—move through time without compressing, shrivelling, deteriorating. Believe it or not, they can. They are designed with precisely that function. Unfortunately, our highly adaptable nature makes us largely oblivious to constants like gravity. But gravity makes itself known in subtle and intimate ways through its cumulative effects on our looks—aging skin, sagging muscles, shorter stature.

Breathing is another constant we take for granted. It is a wonder to behold in our infancy—a healthy baby breathes with its diaphragm, its belly rising and falling. But as we age we lose this gift. Fear leads us to hold our breath, and this becomes habit.

Starved of life-giving oxygen, the body does what it can, drawing into service less efficient muscles to breathe. The result is that, over time, our cells shut down and collapse, forming dense masses of tissue that are easy prey to the erosive forces of nature. In short, we age.

The remedy is to breathe again as we did at the dawn of life, inhaling and exhaling fully with the diaphragm. At the same time, however, we must also melt the accumulated frozen tissue at our core to create the space necessary for this muscle to function properly. If we could accomplish this, it would be like stepping into a time machine that reversed the aging process.

Sound impossible? It's not. The magic art just described is very real, and it has a name: Fluid Isometrics.

Fluid means flowing; Isometrics (literally, “equal measures”) was coined to describe the exercise system in which muscle groups push against each other with equal force.

If we were consistent conscious breathers, we would isometrically resist gravity as we moved fluidly through life, maintaining a balance within. As it stands, however, some insight and discipline are necessary to overcome deep-rooted habits.

Read on and learn how to befriend gravity, to tap into the very seams of time it has imbedded in us and undo them.

PROLOGUE : THE MASKS OF TIME

Do you ever stop and wonder—what makes people what they are? Why do they act in certain predictable ways? Why do their bodies age as they do? Why do so many unrelated individuals share so many physical and behavioral traits? These are questions I have pondered deeply over the years.

The bottom line I keep coming back to is that we all have it in us to be open, balanced, free, to be fluid in all ways: physical, mental, and emotional. Yet we are not. Why?

The reason, I believe, is that we have not given due respect to these wondrous containers we inhabit—our physical bodies.

Treated properly, the body has the potential to be spacious and healthy, ready to greet each moment with childlike enthusiasm and awe. Unfortunately, we were not provided with any clear instructions on how to operate this unique and complex machine. Instead, we let the blind forces of nature do the driving. Needless to say, we are considerably off course.

The most significant consequence is that we are out of touch with the moment. To fill the resultant void, past experience rushes in, armed with proven reactions. These reactions carry expressions that manifest on the surface as masks—masks of anger, guilt, frustration, sadness ... Just look around and you will see them everywhere, on everyone.

Time etches into us the map of our ongoing journey. Dozing in the passenger seat, we let stresses penetrate more and more deeply, laying down and reinforcing our repetitive habits.

If we only understood that we do, in fact, know how to drive, we could take the wheel and get ourselves back on track. That sense of control would transform our journey from one of boredom and anxiety to one of excitement and interest. All that is holding us back is our lack of direction. It is this that I hope to remedy in the pages that follow.

There is a part of us, a tense frightened part called the ego, that will resist this call to freedom. The ego has much invested in preserving the masks of time, because its power, indeed its very survival, lies in concealment. It knows that when Truth brings forth its light, the darkness that protects and nourishes it will disappear. It knows that in the presence of the Higher Self, the masks come off.

MY STORY : GROWING PAINS

As a child I was many things: bright, fast, competitive, sensitive. I felt very fortunate, as if I had life figured out and everything would be simple. Achievements came easily to me. I did well in school with little effort and was naturally athletic.

But I wanted people to like me and I was shy. It is interesting to consider the dynamics of a single life. Our very uniqueness involves gifts and challenges only we can understand—and that only partially at best.

When I was in my own territory, surrounded by familiar people and places, my life was bountiful. I adapted well at school and interacted well with friends, because I knew my boundaries. Teachers respected me because I excelled at seeking their approval; classmates liked me because I was kind and easygoing and had natural leadership skills—partly as a result of my athletic abilities.

As I ventured into my teens, however, life started throwing me curve balls. I can't say puberty was kind to me. I changed from a skinny, athletic, agile kid to a clumsy, plump adolescent with bad skin and boyish awkwardness. It all hit me in one summer—I gained about twenty pounds and developed breasts seemingly overnight. Add dental braces to the mix. I hardly recognized myself anymore.

I also changed schools. I started attending a private girls' school to enhance my education. Suddenly I was a fish out of water.

Ages thirteen to sixteen were particularly challenging. Everything was in transition: friendships, my body, my abilities. It was as if I had to relearn the whole business of fitting in. My shyness was a major problem, and my competitive spirit was totally confused. Before it had taken little effort to be Number One; now I was struggling with every aspect of my life.

The worst confusion began around the age of fifteen, when boys came into the picture. Many of my friends started dating; some were even in relationships. Boys liked me—but only as a friend. My competitive spirit and athletic ability, fuelled by my insecurity, led me to challenge them in an effort to prove I was better, as if that would make them like me. In other words, I did the exact opposite of what I should have done to make myself attractive to the opposite sex.

It all came to a head when I started attending social functions. I needed help. My shyness made it difficult for me to interact calmly with strangers. I simply didn't know how to communicate at a casual social level. If you happen to share this dysfunction, you know how uncomfortable it is to be in a social situation and not know how to be sociable. I would vacillate from lame attempts at forced conversation to not saying anything and worrying continually that I was being perceived as a snob. I couldn't win.

MY STORY : FALL FROM GRACE

Then I started drinking at parties. With alcohol as my ally, I found an ease of conversation I had never dreamed possible. My guard came down; I could actually enjoy myself.

There were moments when I was funny and even felt respected and liked. I still wasn't attracting boys like some of my other friends, but I was at last finding my way through those incredibly awkward years.

By age sixteen I was thick—not overweight, but strong and athletic. I wanted to be smaller, more feminine, like the girls with the hunky boyfriends. So I stopped eating.

It was great. This seemed like a magical time. I had the strength to resist hunger, my weight dropped rapidly, and guys started to notice me. In just two months everything turned around. I was working in a restaurant weekend nights, so I didn't have time to socialize or drink. I was making my own money. I began to feel free and in control.

Those teenage years of physical and emotional awkwardness were behind me. I looked good, I felt powerful, and I was getting attention from the opposite sex. Best of all, I didn't even care about boys anymore. I had found something far more important within myself. Little did I suspect that this was a feeling I would end up craving for years to come.

It didn't bother me that my newfound power came from something unhealthy and unnatural—starvation. The discipline gave me a sense of accomplishment and a body both I and others could admire.

I lived in this state of bliss for about three months. In July, for my seventeenth birthday, I went to the bar to celebrate with some friends.

It was summer, so I had ample time to work and party.

That summer was charged with excitement. I was at my peak and had only one more year of school to complete before moving on to the next phase of my life.

Partying soon became a regular practice. I seemed to manage it okay. I had a steady boyfriend and a close group of friends; I was still doing well in school and sports and I still looked good. I wasn't starving myself anymore, though I resorted to fasting from time to time when necessary to keep my weight under control.

Towards the end of the school year, with graduation approaching, my growing sense of freedom, independence, and invincibility gave rise to an increased taste for celebration. Partying began to take precedence over conscious action.

And then disaster struck. One night, just two weeks before graduation, the police stopped me driving home from a bar, drunk and underage. That single devastating event altered the entire course of my life.

The disappointment alone in myself and from others was staggering. My parents, my school, my friends ... I had inadvertently affected so many by my unconscious actions. And with stunning swiftness, my freedom was taken from me.

The removal of external privileges, like driving, my parents' trust, my teachers' respect, was horrendously painful. But the most difficult loss was of the belief that I had control of myself.

Angered that I had let alcohol derail my life, I turned to food as a substitute. I ate my way through that summer, desperately trying to fill the void. And, yes, I added back some bulk.

MY STORY : HABITS CROSS THE LINE

I entered University in the fall. Disappointed and weak, I longed to experience again the feeling of being in control. I no longer possessed the resolve to starve myself. So I began a cycle of binge eating and drinking followed by days of consuming nothing but Diet Coke. My weeks assumed a fairly consistent pattern: Sunday to Wednesday—Diet Coke; Thursday to Saturday—drunken binges and gorging.

Imagine my frustration when, despite the Diet Coke fasts, the weight scale reading didn't drop. In fact, I was getting heavier. And the drunken binges, as you can imagine, made my behaviour increasingly chaotic, which dragged me into an enormous rut of guilt. Who had I become? What had happened to the little girl who used to find life so simple? The former honour roll student of a prestigious private girls' school finished first year University with a 1.48 grade point average.

Now I had to deal with academic failure on top of everything else. I cared too much about others' opinions of me to show weakness or ask for help. I appeared strong even as I was sinking inside. The total loser who had taken over my self-image I now saw reflected in the eyes of everyone I encountered. This fuelled my need to escape, and for the next several years I let alcohol dominate my life.

The compulsion to mask inner turmoil with outer strength enabled me to finish University, certify as an Athletic Therapist, and start my professional career. To complement my alcoholism, I became a workaholic. I hid my pain and confusion, put on a brave face, and swallowed any truth that was screaming to be expressed, all for fear of judgment.

I lived like this for years. I became a passive spectator to my own life. I strained after the slightest connection with any moment as the days steadily depleted me. I still managed to act like someone who had it together, which only increased my loneliness. Repeated bouts of drunkenness ending in blackouts intensified my fear of disconnection.

I see now how the cycle perpetuated itself. I would awaken from a blackout, and the fear of what I might have said or done during it would seize me. But I didn't dare ask anybody, because I didn't want anyone to see how out of control I was. And so I would seek again the solace that first drink always granted—followed by more of the same, until the ultimate escape of unconsciousness was achieved.

I find it miraculous that I survived those years. I know it was only by the grace of some higher guidance that I didn't inadvertently end my own or someone else's life.

Whenever those feelings of frustration and anxiety recur today, I remember that I survived a life unconscious, driven by insecurity, doubt, fear, and addiction. I was lonely—not for someone else, but for myself.

I understand now that it was my ego that had taken over my existence and was using me for its own ends. My true self—that confident, kind little girl—had been crushed under years of falsehood. Years of trying to be what I thought others wanted me to be rather than who I was. I can see the pattern. How habits became addictions. How my desires to achieve became reins for the ego to grasp. How I did achieve alcoholism, eating disorders, workaholism, and the many other excessive behaviours that took me from my true intention.

MY STORY : REDEMPTION

It helped me, years ago, to learn that God is found in the balance between positive and negative. I had read that the farther one falls in life, the greater one's potential to rise. This insight gave me much courage, something to hold onto while I struggled back up from those bottom rungs. It is worth noting that from the outside, my life would not have appeared at all to be the disaster I was experiencing. I did well in my career and maintained financial independence.

But inside, far from those safe, busy shores, I was drowning. My self-loathing, my complete disconnection from my truth, held me in a dark, deep whirlpool of despair. Joy and meaning were so out of reach that some days I prayed for death. I share these things because I know there are countless others out there who are feeling just as lost, trapped in their private hells, without a light to guide them or a hand to hold. I want them to know they are neither lost nor alone. Those who suffer most have the most to offer. I believe that if, when we are at our lowest ebb, we can see a purpose in the pain; if we can learn to connect to the power in it; then we can help to heal the world.

To me, the hypersensitives (depressives) among us are the frequency absorbers. The ones who take in energies too intense for the majority to handle. Without this buffer, life would descend into chaos. If we only recognized this higher function of depression, we could use it more efficiently to bring forth our gifts.

I used to feel terribly alone, not knowing how to express my uniqueness, lacking, not only the words, but also the faith that what I had to say even mattered. Today, having moved past that place to one of greater self-worth, I want to help others do the same.

THE PATH OF CHANGE

There is a link between our physical, emotional, and mental beings; each affects the others. When we say, for instance, that we are spiralling out of control, that is literally what is happening to the connective tissue in the body. It is getting sucked, as by a vortex, into the space within—the space where the true self resides—a space it steadily fills until there is no room left for that truth to express itself. Such inversions are called energy cysts, because they absorb and retain psychic energy, making it inaccessible to us.

It is the ego that cultivates these cysts, and they are responsible for all of our physical, mental, and emotional suffering. Once we understand this, we can begin the work of breaking them up and releasing their energetic potential.

Our emotional reactions are glued to static patterns of thought, which are sealed in posture, which is anchored to gravity by energy cysts. Cut these anchors, and you free your emotions to respond to every moment as if for the first time. It is the psychic equivalent of cleaning your closet to make room for new things.

In the course of this work, fears surface and memories are opened for re-examination. You get to look back on the past through a clear lens, one that admits forgiveness and compassion. This in turn alters the way you see the present, giving you hope for the future.

Life is hard, yet so easy to change. The most difficult challenge is to want to change. Change frightens us because the ego derives its strength from the familiar. So to change means to break free of the ego; and on that point, rest assured, the ego will oppose you with all its might.

Ego and gravity are co-conspirators in our downfall. Gravity has the advantage of being a force so constant we forget it is there. Of course we know in principle of its existence, but we lose touch with the practical reality of its incessant dragging, torquing hold on our living tissue. This is not some grim inevitability we must passively accept. In our very physical design lies nature's most potent anti-gravity device. When we connect to it, we can move through time without getting old; we can even take accumulated time out of our tissue.

Fluid Isometrics and Block Therapy are developed for precisely this purpose. Once we own our innate potential, our bodies will be ageless, our emotions pure, our thoughts clear. We will become the very best versions of ourselves.

To those lost in darkness I offer this beacon. Yes, life is difficult, lonely, excruciating at times. Yes, we have demons that hold us back from joy, progress, and contentment. And, yes, we are incredibly flawed.

But we are also the opposite. You have it in you to find your higher self, the you who has been crushed into submission. By moving into the depths of your tissue, as shown in my program, you will shine light into your darkness and breathe warmth into your heart.

Just start the journey, be patient, and record the changes. As with gravity, when change is continual, we often don't see it. Awaken to yourself, your posture, your breath, and your pain. See your pain as your friend, not your enemy.

REJECTION

The bottom line in my personal struggles was that I was hiding from everybody out of fear of rejection. I have thought much about this, for it seems to have been at the root of all my unconscious reactions.

We are divided between our higher, or true, selves and our egos.

The physical vehicle of the higher self is the heart. As it sends blood to all our cells, the heart is the body's central switchboard. The ego, on the other hand, resides in the brain. It is the ego's job to interpret the messages of the heart and act accordingly.

In a perfectly aligned body, blood would reach every cell equally and the messages to the brain would be easily understood. Our actions would then be direct expressions of our higher selves.

This obviously is not our present condition. Due to compression of tissue under the constant forces of nature, we have developed blocks like dams in our bodies. These blocks prevent blood from reaching many of our cells, which respond by going into hibernation. The resultant gaps in the heart's communication with the brain force the ego to rely increasingly on memory when deciding how to deal with life. And so are born our repetitive reactive habits.

Every moment is unique, new, and we have the ability to experience it that way. But what happens most often instead is that something in the moment triggers an unconscious association with the past, and memory takes over. Memory inhabits the communication gaps between body and brain. And memory is the ego's soul.

As Eckhart Tolle states in his book *The Power of Now*, the ego thrives on negativity. Negativity is rooted in stress, which is our emotional/physiological response to that limitless storehouse of illusion: time.

What no longer is. What may yet be. These nonexistent things fill our awareness and charge it with FEAR—False Energy Acting Real.

The crucial point of reference to fear in the body is our breathing. When we breathe with the chest, as we habitually do, we are surrendering to gravity, the pull of the earth, whose rotation and revolution compel us to create time. The diaphragm, on the other hand, as I have said, is our most potent anti-gravity muscle. Full conscious diaphragmatic breathing can free us from gravity, time, and fear. Eckhart Tolle says God lives in the moment, which is linked to this mechanism. There is no stress in the moment, only action.

Those who practise conscious diaphragmatic breathing feed their bodies approximately 600% more oxygen than those who breathe with the chest. As a result, their tissue suffers less compression, because the extra oxygen in their blood maintains more internal space. This enables more cells to communicate with the heart, so the brain receives a more complete set of messages. The result is a life more conscious: the ego is in direct communication with the higher self, our actions show us at our best, and life is rewarding and complete.

I believe that at base our feelings of rejection come from our trillions of cells that have been cut off from life. Intuitively we experience their exile. But they have not abandoned us. We—that is to say, our egos—have abandoned them. And so it is the ego that we need to overcome, by learning to overcome the effects of gravity.

THE FREEDOM OF UNCERTAINTY

What is it about change that frightens us?

The unknown.

Here is where the ego thrives. The unknown presents us with vast opportunity for creative growth. It also presents us with opportunity for rejection. I am experiencing this ambivalence right now. I am attempting to share my vision and my insights with an unknown audience. I have to start somewhere. Taking the plunge, putting myself out there, is scary.

Some, perhaps even many, may not like what I have to say. They may not want to hear it. My efforts may lead in the end to failure—rejection.

But how will I know unless I try?

This is how the ego manipulates our lives. When we feel fear, we react by holding our breath, creating a gap for the ego to lodge in. From there it weaves its future story—an affirmation of our fear—which we believe to be true. The more we fear, the less we breathe; the less we breathe the more constricted our internal space becomes, and the fewer cells can communicate with the heart. The cycle is in motion; the rift between higher self and ego grows.

Once negativity takes hold, we often do not follow through on our initially exciting intentions for fear of failure. This almost happened to me while I was writing this book. I wanted to cancel a presentation I had arranged because I was afraid nobody would come. I had to remind myself that the opposite was equally possible—many might come and have a good experience. There was only one way to find out. In any case, I asked myself, what constitutes success?

According to my ego, I would be successful only if the event sold out and everybody loved my presentation. My higher self, on the other hand, told me to be grateful that I had reached this point in my journey: I now possessed the courage to stand up in front of a group of people and talk, something that in the past would have been out of the question.

The way of the ego is in the end self-defeating. Its perfectionism ensures that success will always be out of reach. Fortunately, I have become more attuned to my higher self. This doesn't mean that I don't feel the fear of failure or rejection. What it means is that I am willing to experience the moment for whatever it has to teach me. In the case of the presentation, even if only a few people showed up, perhaps the message would come across that much more powerfully, which in turn might open doors I could not have imagined with the limited vision of the ego.

I think this is the most beautiful aspect of connecting to the higher self: you open doors for change without necessarily consciously choosing to change. Have faith; take risks. New moments, new experiences will then present themselves, and they will often grant you your best opportunities for success.

The most important change you can choose to make right now is to become a conscious breather. This is truly the greatest gift you can give yourself because it will unite you with your higher self. Your higher self wants love, success, abundance, and happiness. It wants you to feel joy, contentment, and peace. It is your direct path to fulfillment in life.

SELF TRANSFORMATION

What would the world be like if everyone were a little kinder, a little calmer, a little happier? If we showed more compassion and forgiveness to those around us, wouldn't life be great?

Easy to say, but how do we get there?

Our egos, remember, are able to maintain their tyranny over us because of the gaps in our internal communications network—gaps resulting from compressed tissue that blocks blood.

Small wonder we find it so difficult to be compassionate, forgiving, grateful, kind. These are heart functions, contrary to the ego's mandate.

There is a way, however, to change that. It is through meditation. Meditation means increasing awareness with focused attention.

This isn't easy. Our minds are so set in their compulsive habit of thinking about the past and the future that it is a minor miracle if we are able to concentrate on what is right in front of us for longer than a couple of seconds.

Well, I have developed a form of meditation that is not only effective but also rich in additional benefits. And its basis is profoundly simple: connect with your pain.

As we age, unless we have maintained a lifelong practice of conscious abdominal diaphragmatic breathing (I have yet to meet anyone who has), our energy declines. This is because gravity depletes the space within us. In turn, our tissue accumulates age. With natural efficiency the body channels its available energy first to its essential life sustaining organs, drawing what it needs away from its periphery.

In this way, much like a loaf of bread, we grow stale from the outside in. Our skin wrinkles, our senses dim, and we lose our flexibility.

Putting energy into the surface of the body while consciously breathing with the diaphragm will melt the barriers you created over time, freeing blood to flow to places previously blocked. Putting space back into tissue will remove accumulated time, or age, from it. Breaking down the walls will let your cells communicate with your brain, awakening you to the moment. Oxygen will fill the gaps in your system, building bridges to your higher self. The more bridges you build, the more places needing them you will find.

This inner search will become your meditation, as you scan your tissue for residue of the past. Light will shine into the darkness of old wounds; a new direction in life will emerge.

I must say, this form of body work has become for me a strange paradox: a healing addiction. Not only has it brought my ego to my higher self, it has transformed my physical body in remarkable ways.

Once you have regained your inner space, you will have freedom, function, and flexibility. Pain will diminish, stagnant tissue will revive, and your natural beauty will be revealed.

THE FIRST STEP

Face it: almost all our time and energy goes into scripting, directing, and acting out the dramas of our lives (with attention to make-up, costumes, and sets). And since conflict is the essence of drama, we amplify the wrongs done to us. We do this so successfully we forget we are in charge of the production. We buy our own illusion.

Only one person controls your life, and that is you. You can certainly allow yourself to be manipulated; it may feel very much as if you are the helpless victim, but there are always choices open to you.

Even if your choice is simply to accept your situation for now, to take time to breathe and learn more about your options, you are exercising your power. In an extreme case like that of terminal illness, you have the options of accepting or fighting—both difficult journeys, but choices nonetheless.

Once we allow ourselves to view life in broader perspective we enter a whole new level of freedom. Freedom to choose our path as opposed to remaining stuck. There is nothing more depressing than feeling you are a prisoner in your own life.

Ironically, those who feel most trapped are often those with the most material options. It is as if the very weight of their wealth immobilizes them. This is why hitting bottom can be a turning point—the weight is gone; suddenly one is free.

We are closest to the higher self, we hear it most clearly, when there aren't a lot of people and possessions to distract us. Without the externals that defined it, the ego dissolves, revealing limitless vistas of possibility. Of course this doesn't feel so great at the time. But anybody who has been through it and moved forward will tell you it was a landmark in his or her life's journey.

It is not necessary, however, to undergo such radical purification to completely change your course in life for the better. One simple choice, one small change, can open the way to a gentle yet profound transformation. Change the way you breathe, and you change the whole direction of your being. By this I mean learn to breathe consciously. Conscious and unconscious breathers are two completely different animals.

The conscious breather is present and meets all challenges and obstacles as opportunities for learning and growth.

The conscious breather understands emotional rhythms and cycles and realizes that there will be moments when life feels unbearable, but that these will pass and make way for others that are joyous and exciting.

The conscious breather feels fear but sees through its illusion to the next step in development.

The conscious breather has an entirely different physiology, and therefore a different body—in appearance, function, and feeling.

The conscious breather uses the body's natural antigravity mechanism to move through time without tissue compression—essentially without aging.

The conscious breather knows the connectedness of all things—the self, life, nature, the Universe.

Imagine. By changing this one simple thing we can become what we most wish to be. Peaceful.

This is why Fluid Isometrics and Block Therapy are pivotal. To gain access to the breath we must bring ourselves to a place of peace within. There is a net of connective tissue that holds the entire body together. It is called the fascia. When we don't use the diaphragm to breathe, energy cysts develop in it and begin to twist under the pressure of natural forces. The body pulls the fascia inward through this winding—literally, it screws into itself. Over years, this spiral netting takes over the inner space. Snakelike in form, it coils around the organs and tissues, cutting them off from the heat at the core.

Stress then pervades the system. It is impossible simply to start breathing diaphragmatically with this inner dynamic in progress. What Fluid Isometrics and Block Therapy do is magnetically pull the coiled netting back to the surface, restoring the lost inner space and freeing the diaphragm from its constriction. As the diaphragm gets working, the increased oxygen in the tissues breaks the magnetic hold of the spirals, granting access to yet deeper layers of torsion.

TALK TO YOUR TISSUE

For years we have been sending negative messages to the cells in our bodies. The rejected cells, the ones in hibernation, with no space, no life running through them, are the ones we most abuse. This is because they comprise our most unhealthy looking tissue, and we just don't like the appearance they present.

For me, my stomach and facial skin were the areas I loathed. Wanting vibrancy, health, and fluidity, I denounced the parts of me that were the opposite of that ideal.

This kind of internal dialogue carries a frequency—an emotional resonance of chronic angst over what we seemingly cannot alter. If we understood this dynamic, it would be obvious that we must change it. Because form mirrors essence. These emotions have a face.

Take the time to look in the mirror when you are angry. Your expression says it all. This is emotion imprinting itself on the tissue of your face. Over time the imprint becomes set, magnetically sealed. Anyone you confront will respond by reflecting your own signal back at you, perpetuating the cycle. To break it, you have to change the response patterns that create the expression.

In the same way, if we consciously change how we communicate with the parts of our bodies we dislike, we will change the physical expression of those tissues.

Experiments have been conducted with sound and the patterns it makes in water. Beautiful, harmonious sounds, it has been found, create beautiful, harmonious patterns. Conversely, discordant sounds generate inharmonious patterns.

Mantras are repeated, conscious verbal messages that can influence body tissues like sound in water. In my case, repeating, “I love you stomach. Forgive me. I only feel gratitude. You are beautiful, sensuous, attractive. The systems within work efficiently and are healthy,” proved very effective.

Create your own specific mantra for any area you would like to change. The positive frequency you send will form the pattern for a more harmonious expression: healthy, vibrant, and youthful. Connect to those forgotten, rejected cells. They long for your attention.

PATIENCE

My impatience has been the source of many of my frustrations.

Back in my drinking days, my eagerness to get to a happier place would induce me to drink a lot quickly right at the start of a session. Desire would overshadow reason, with the result that suddenly I would have too much alcohol in my system and couldn't turn back. My body would have to process the excess in its own time—the liver at least is patient.

Once again, it all came down to ego. Mental desire linked to emotional craving overpowered my awareness of my body and its limitations, leaving me hung over and depleted the following day. Caught in this emotional trap, I didn't realize until much later that impatience was the enemy feeding my addiction.

All our gut reactions, to events, to things, to people, are in service to this enemy. It is as if someone is continually whispering in our ears the hypnotic chant: if you hesitate you lose. And so the gap between ego and memory, compulsion and reflection, is maintained.

This would not be the case if the gap were filled with conscious diaphragmatic breaths. Specifically, the exhalation phase of the breath is the key to conscious action. If we don't release the old to create space for the new, the ego remains comfortably settled.

Try it. The next time you find yourself in one of those stressful situations that triggers a familiar knee-jerk emotional reaction, breathe out slowly and deliberately until your lungs are completely empty. Notice how calm you feel, how light, how focused. Everything shifts. You are now standing back and observing the situation, as opposed to being caught up in it. And in that moment you see it clearly, as if for the first time. You are free to respond to it creatively.

Once I was with a friend and he asked me a question. I was reading something at the time, so my head was down. I quickly looked up, only partially elevating my head, and started to answer him.

I had at this point been learning about the ego in yoga teacher training class. For the first time now I took note of my whole response as the answer was leaving my lips. My intention was to be kind; impatience, however, had produced a head and eye posture that was anything but.

I immediately caught myself, took a deep breath, lifted my head fully, softened my eyes, and smiled. That was a powerful moment for me. I was becoming a conscious observer of my own behaviour, and this practice had enabled me to introduce patience to my response.

I don't know whether we can ever fully master the ego. But we can certainly develop the discipline to keep it in line, and in the process learn to relax. The rewards are worth the effort.

PERSUASION vs. FORCE

One of my most striking childhood memories is of a dramatization I saw on television of the fable “The North Wind and the Sun.” You may know the story. The North Wind and the Sun had a contest to see which was stronger. They spotted a traveller on the road below and agreed that whichever got his coat off first would win. The North Wind blew and blew, trying to tear the coat off, but the harder it blew, the more tightly the man held the garment around him. Then the Sun blazed down. Growing warm, the man soon took off his coat of his own accord. This presentation left a lasting impression on me, one that eventually found its way into my philosophy and work.

We can treat the body as either the North Wind or the Sun might—that is, in either a forceful or a persuasive way. For example, we can fight illness with antibiotics. Antibiotics, however, cause invading organisms to develop stronger defences against them, creating a need for stronger antibiotics—an endless cycle. The more powerful an army becomes, the more powerful its enemies become.

The persuasive approach, on the other hand, involves gently changing the body until it is no longer a suitable environment for invaders. Rather than perpetuate a self-defeating cycle that amplifies conflict through impatience, we can patiently guide the body in a healing evolution.

The same applies to relationships. In his book *The Celestine Prophecy*, James Redfield teaches that any conflict, whether between two people or two countries, is a struggle of energy. In personal relationships these struggles are unconscious because we have inherited them from our ancestors. When two people with opposing views both feel they are right, each one’s ego will hold onto that belief with all its might in order to preserve its identity. If, however, one were to relinquish the ego and give the other energy instead of trying to take it away, a new dynamic would be born—one of peace and reconciliation.

The operant word here, whether in health or relationship, is patience. The ability to wait. If we cultivated the discipline of inner dialogue, we would have greater control over our outer experience.

WAITING AND WATCHING

Waiting for results in any situation is always extremely difficult. With no certain direction we feel out of control. The ego demands a clear plan of action—it must “know” what to do. The idea that we can steer the course of events always calms us.

The problem is, unforeseen variables inevitably arise to redirect us, and if we are not prepared to treat them as more than unwelcome interruptions, our progress will be slow and bumpy.

The higher self is aware of this. It understands the mystery of life. It knows that every variable is an opportunity to learn and perhaps discover a better course than the ego, with its narrow vision, could possibly have charted. It wisely waits. And watches. “Sleeping on it” brings clarity to our choices because a different day brings a different perspective. Patience is a sorely lacking commodity in this fast-paced, convenience-filled world. If we can develop it, starting with the awareness and practice of conscious diaphragmatic breathing, we will have acquired an invaluable tool, one that will enable us to alter choices and therefore directions of movement. Rather than staying on the treadmill, repeating the same cycles over and over, we can step off and observe.

The observer can see patterns. Once a pattern is recognized, it can be changed. Karma is consequence of past action. Its function is to help us perceive and break free of repetitive patterns. When undesirable consequences recur, we eventually will modify the actions that have led to them. Karma continually nudges us in the right direction. This is not judgement; it is reflection. Fear binds us to the past. The past is gone. If you don’t want to repeat it, avail yourself of the limitless opportunities for change that the present offers.

THE DRAMA SPIRAL

Drama, the ego's drug of choice, is based on negativity. The news media, for instance, as is well known, have no interest in good deeds, miracles, or wonders; only scandal, crisis and destruction are worthy of note. This is what the collective ego wants. It craves the rush of fear.

Remember, fear is False Energy Acting Real—the perfect definition of drama. Whenever we feel fear, or its ally pain, we instinctively hold our breath. This seals the imprint of the traumatic moment in our body tissue. Whatever posture we held at the freeze point then becomes the fixed expression of our upset. Release can only come through exhalation. Each moment we fail to release adds its charge, as our bodies become living scrapbooks of bad experience. Watch the people in a crowd. Do you have any trouble spotting the angry ones, the timid ones, the hostile, the defeated? They are like players in an ancient drama, defined by their masks, their costumes, their stances. Remember that you are one of them.

As I have said before, reality is a mirror. What we put out gets reflected back at us by the people and events we encounter. The result is a drama spiral: negative frequencies reinforcing themselves exponentially through time, with gravity embossing it all in physical mass. Again, this happens because the ego is in charge. Fortunately the diaphragm, like any muscle, can be brought under conscious control.

Bottom line: if we aren't conscious, we are unconscious. Unconsciousness is the kingdom of the ego; it has absolute power there. And it maintains that power through fear. As long as we are afraid, we are too preoccupied to question its authority.

In the conscious breather fear is an emotional charge and gets released with each full diaphragmatic breath. These releases keep the inner state balanced and neutral, so gravity has very little influence. To be perfectly aligned, balanced, and spacious is to stand in virtually weightless magnetic equilibrium.

We can learn much by observing the human body in its purest form, that is to say, in infancy. Healthy babies naturally breathe with their bellies because they have not yet allowed gravity to claim them. Their bodies have not yet accumulated the emotional charges that add mass. They have not yet learned to create reactive habits—their personal dramas.

THE SEEDS WE SOW

Life is not reality. Life is the ego's pet creative project, the eternal work in progress at which it labours obsessively, repairing and polishing, like a mad genius who has lost touch with reality. This is why our stories, even about the exact same things, can vary so remarkably. We each have our own take on "how it is," and what's more we've put a lot of effort into learning it so we're not going to give it up easily.

We learn what we like and dislike. We learn to fear things. We learn how to interpret and adapt to our surroundings. We learn all this from a place of innocence and openness, and we plant these seeds of "truth" in the core. Through time the seeds grow roots that entangle and seal our natures.

The roots develop first in the diaphragm and then extend downward to connect with the earth. A main purpose of full conscious diaphragmatic breathing is to direct the roots through the soles of the feet. This brings the entire Chakra system into alignment. Continual massage and energizing by the diaphragm links the seeds to the life force of the earth, enabling the soul to fulfil its highest potential.

The place of the soul is the space within. The more inner space, the more room for the soul to expand and create. The result is a fuller expression of our God-given gifts—the legacy of the seeds.

Left unattended, as they are when we breathe unconsciously with the chest, the seeds become the passive nuclei of increasingly dense meandering root systems that clog our inner space, constricting and ultimately suffocating the soul.

THE FAT TOOTH

I come from a family where weight concerns were a significant seed crop. At a very young age I learned to count calories, keep an eye on the scale, and equate physical size with self-esteem.

I was greatly impressed by a TV show I saw once that said we don't have a "sweet tooth," we have a "fat tooth." I thought about my own food cravings and saw the truth in that statement.

Today I apply this insight to my eating, and for the first time I truly enjoy food without guilt. If you ask any of my friends, you will be told that I am especially fond of fat. Extra butter, extra peanut butter, extra nuts—I eat a lot of fat.

I used to do the opposite. I avoided fats, but I craved sugar. Or so I thought. We have not learned to feed our bodies well. We struggle with excess weight, health problems, pain, depression ... all because we are malnourished. Not only in terms of food, but in terms of oxygen (due to our poor breathing habits), rest (due to our fast-paced, stress-filled lifestyles) and love (due to our unrealistic expectations as to what those closest to us are supposed to provide).

In the same way that the ego feeds emotionally on fear-based drama, it feeds physically on carbohydrates. This is because the ego is a weaker version of our true selves. Among other things, it is lazy; so it wants fuel it can easily acquire and break down. And in keeping with its erratic nature, it craves erratic blood sugar levels.

When we breathe diaphragmatically, we maintain a higher overall body core temperature. This means we can break down higher quality longer lasting fuels, like protein and good fat. This helps keep us level and balanced—less susceptible to ego.

Fat is an essential component of our physical makeup. The brain is largely fat; the nerves are lined with fat, vital for impulse transmission; the lymphatic system is mainly fat-based. It only makes sense that we need fat in our diet.

In salad dressing, oil carries flavours throughout the salad. In the body, fat carries nutrients where they are needed and takes by-products and waste away.

In cooking, fat forms a surface that evenly distributes heat so food won't stick and burn. In the body, this amazing substance ensures a uniform distribution of energy.

So why are we afraid of fat?

Of course we don't want to be fat, for very good reasons to do with appearance and health.

Here are some helpful facts.

The expression "well-oiled machine" can be applied to the healthy body. Fat keeps our inner surfaces slippery, decreasing friction, just as oil in a frying pan keeps food from sticking. It gives joints their gliding, fluid mobility.

But as with butter or oil, if it is cold, fat loses these beneficial properties. Cold butter is a hard solid mass. If you heated it to 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit, it would be fluid.

At room temperature (the temperature of much of our "frozen" tissue), fat forms solid lumps. Many of us have experienced the frustration of feeling those lumps in our tissue. And many of us have attempted to get rid of them by decreasing our calorie intake—usually by decreasing the amount of fat we ingest.

The irony is that the body needs fat to be healthy and beautiful. Without proper assimilation of good fat, the body becomes brittle. Most importantly, the brain and nervous system deteriorate, and this gives rise to many diseases.

Three essentials of good physical health are optimal body temperature (regulated by the breath), proper nutrition, and adequate amounts of rest. Maintaining these is a discipline, but it needn't be stressful.

Working hard to look and feel good is a contradiction. Try a different approach. Get to know your body through touch and breath; learn to listen to yourself. Healing begins with the art of relaxation.

WASTING TIME

What an interesting expression! Either we are so frantically busy we have no time, or we're bored and have time to waste. For the ego, these are the only options. Living consciously means bringing such extremes into balance. It's all connected. Balanced practices like choosing good food, eating slowly, breathing with the diaphragm, and relaxing, lead to balanced blood sugar levels, resulting in a balanced outlook that appreciates the wisdom in continuing these and other such practices.

A fully conscious person is neither driven nor dull. Who needs to rush, when each step proceeds naturally to the next? Who can weary of the endless revelations awareness brings?

There is a precept in yoga called "effortless effort." This describes perfectly the life of the conscious individual. In effortless effort, challenges, frustrations, and difficulties dance a graceful duet with successes, freedoms, and opportunities. Life is fulfilling rather than exhausting.

We all have the ability to achieve this, but it is you who must choose to change.

One thing you will learn as you become more conscious is that concepts like lacking and squandering time are meaningless, because there is no time. Our souls are timeless and full of wisdom. Conscious breathing simply allows you to feel it.

FIGHT, FLIGHT... OR FREEZE

The body deals with external threat through the fight/flight response.

Our adrenal glands are situated at the top of the kidneys—directly below the diaphragm muscle in the back. A conscious breather, whose body is in balance, reacts to immediate threat by holding the breath.

Because we view the world face on, this reaction occurs in the anterior diaphragm, causing a contraction (compression) of fascia in the belly. This sends impulses to the adrenal glands, which respond by producing the hormone adrenaline. We are all familiar with the resultant “adrenaline rush”—a surge accompanied by strong emotional sensations and equally strong reflexive responses. The body is ready and able either to confront or run away from the threat.

I attended an outdoor concert recently. The organizers had set up tents to accommodate about eight hundred people. Behind the tents a cannon had been stationed to send off the final performance with a bang—fourteen explosions in all.

The first four reports made me jump, my heart racing. The next four brought a yet more intense response, as I was now anticipating the noise—augmenting my feelings with fear. But the last six affected me less strongly; I had become desensitized.

At the very end, with the sound still ringing in my ears, I noticed something unusual. A truck was parked beside the cannon, one window slightly open for ventilation. As I watched, a wriggling mass emerged slowly from the narrow aperture. It took me a moment to recognize that it was a dog. It finished squeezing through, jumped down, and took off like a shot. I have never seen a dog move like that. It fought the window as if its life were at stake and virtually flew away. Most remarkably, it escaped through a space not nearly large enough for its bulk. It could only have accomplished this by a feat of metamorphosis: by becoming semi-fluid.

Let me share another story with you. Years ago, during a very unhealthy phase, I experienced what I still consider my strongest physical reaction ever to a perceived threat. I was in Victoria B.C. with my family. One day we hiked up a mountain path until we came to a trestle—a wooden framework like a railway bridge extending over a breathtaking view of stream and forest. In the middle of the trestle was a plank for people to stand on and look down. At the time I lived on the fifteenth floor of a highrise, in an apartment with a balcony. I had no issue with heights. I was excited to see and set out onto the structure.

The trestle had spaces between the boards, not wide enough for me to fall through, but certainly wide enough to reveal the great distance below my feet.

Then it happened. I froze in my tracks. My breath escaped me in a rush and I found myself unable to breathe in again. I was paralyzed.

All I could manage was to sink to my knees. If a bear had been after me I could not have budged. After what seemed an eternity, my mother and sister came to get me, at which point I was able, with their assistance, to walk shakily back to the solid assurance of the mountain. I have never experienced such all-consuming, debilitating terror.

This was neither fight nor flight—just freeze.

I realize now that at the time of the incident my body was in such chaos that my core was frozen. I was already holding my breath continually out of chronic fear. In the face of perceived threat, the fight/ flight mechanism would not function because I had exhausted it.

This, unfortunately, is the case with the majority of us today. Our world of chronic stress has paralyzed us. We are frozen.

Physiologically, in this respect animals have an advantage over us: they bear their weight on all fours. Their hip and shoulder joints thus work together to sustain the force of gravity evenly as they move, which results in uniform energy flow and temperature regulation in the core.

We, on the other hand, as bipedal creatures, carry our weight on our hips. Unless we develop and maintain correct posture, our upper halves gradually congeal. This is why a terrified animal can instantly fight or flee a threat, sometimes with superhuman ability, like the dog in the truck, whereas a terrified human is often, as I was on the bridge, a proverbial deer in the headlights.

GOING WITH THE FLOW

It all comes down to this. Life will continue periodically to throw us off course; the best way to deal with it is to stay fluid.

I didn't develop Fluid Isometrics. It developed me. It came to me at the turn of the century and I have been working since to share it.

Fluid Isometrics teaches the techniques for integrating what we need to be fluid—in attitude, breath, tissue, and mind. Everything becomes easier when we go with the flow.

My own struggle to make these principles and skills available to all has not been easy. There have been setbacks that I experienced as failures, as my ego was not evolved enough to see the bigger picture.

Looking back now, I recognize the lessons and gifts that accompanied those apparent failures—I was on the paths that were right for the time.

Among other things, some of my closest friendships have been born in times when my plans didn't work out. Viewing life with an eagle's eye, we see past, present, and future all at once. This is the essence of faith. Believing that if we live in the moment we will recognize our opportunities, while staying fluid enough to change course when it feels right, we open ourselves to life's magic.

It's time to give yourself and those around you a break. Let go of regret. Wherever you are, whatever your situation, decide to accept joy.

Forgive the past; forget the future; give yourself time and space for the present. Connect with the moment through your breath. It is the only way to true peace and freedom.

BASIC PHYSIOLOGY : THE LAND OF THE DIAPHRAGM

I believe it is important to understand the reasons for doing things a certain way, if we are to do them properly. So far this book has explained the theoretical reasons for changing our breathing habits. Now let's look at some practical ones.

I would like you to bring your attention to your chest cavity. You have twelve sets of ribs. Those at the top, by the collar bones, are the first set; they number down to twelve. The last two ribs on either side are called floating ribs, because they aren't attached to the plate of bone at the front of the chest—the sternum.

This arrangement allows for mobility and stability.

The ribs are there to protect our organs. The heart and lungs, as we know, are in the chest. They are separated from the abdominal organs by the diaphragm muscle. Below the diaphragm are: on the left, the stomach; on the right, the liver and gall bladder; in the center, the pancreas.

Put your hands on your lower ribs, around your stomach and liver.

If you are breathing with your diaphragm this area will be soft and fluid, as it is in constant motion.

Most of us don't breathe this way. Instead we use the muscles between our middle to upper ribs. Physically, this changes everything.

First, the organs above and below the diaphragm aren't receiving the continual massage they would get with proper inhalation and exhalation. As a result the area is cooler, harder, and more susceptible to gravity.

Second, the muscles between the ribs, meant mainly for mobility and only partially for respiration, work overtime at a job they were not designed for. The extra stress makes them also cooler, harder, and more susceptible to gravity.

Imagine an office where five people work, each with a specific function. If everybody does his or her job, the office will run smoothly and efficiently.

Now imagine three of those workers are slackers. That leaves two people doing the work of five. The jobs still get done, but there is going to be a lot of stress and tension in that environment.

The same thing happens in the body when we don't breathe with the diaphragm. The basic functional requirements are fulfilled, but the instrument is anything but a well-oiled machine.

BASIC PHYSIOLOGY : DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

If you have access to the Internet or an anatomy book, take the time to look at the diaphragm and surrounding organs. A recommended website is www.wikipedia.org.

Note the lungs. They are cone-shaped. Their base (supported by the diaphragm) contains 70% of the alveoli. These pockets are the oxygen receptors.

When we use the diaphragm to exhale, it moves upward into the chest cavity and massages the lower lobes of the lungs. This helps to squeeze carbon dioxide and other waste products out, and keeps the tissue heated and fluid.

When we use it to inhale, the diaphragm moves downward, making room for the alveoli to absorb oxygen, which will then be distributed throughout the body. This downward movement also massages the abdominal organs.

The importance of the diaphragm's massaging action cannot be stressed enough. Our body tissues need to be kept at a certain temperature or their functions are impaired—things slow down when they get cold. Massage generates warmth and stimulates flow.

For the stomach, it means better digestion.

For the pancreas, producer of insulin, it means improved blood sugar regulation—a crucial issue for many today.

For the gall bladder, it means fats can be properly melted and distributed. And for the liver, it means more efficient cleansing of the blood.

These are some of the many physical benefits of conscious breathing.

THE PRACTICE

I could go on and on about why it is good to breathe consciously, but as with any practice, the proof lies in the doing. As a therapist, I can melt scar tissue, removing blocks to blood flow, but only the patient can choose to breathe consciously.

Instead of giving you breathing meditations—there are already many available in books and on the Internet—I would like you to keep focused on the essentials.

Exhalation is the crucial phase of your breathing that pushes toxins, emotional charges, and functional by-products out of you. Whenever you have the opportunity, breathe out fully. Imagine that your core is a sponge, and in exhaling you are squeezing it out. Note how much easier it is to draw in a good deep breath once you have done this.

What I describe may take a while to master. Don't get discouraged.

Like any muscle, the diaphragm weakens with disuse, but the more you exercise it, the stronger it will become. And as it does, you will be impressed by the increasing control this powerful core muscle gives you over your inner environment—that is to say, your stress levels.

Your body was designed to function in a specific way. Use it properly, and the rewards will be exponential. So start right now. Make every breath count. To help you stay on track, I leave you with this motto:

Don't hold your stomach in; squeeze your stomach small.

EPILOGUE : A NEW DIRECTION

The complete self-transformation that is the focus of Fluid Isometrics doesn't happen overnight. As we have discussed, the ego will not willingly surrender what it has worked so long and hard to build—its secure fortress. It will use all sorts of fear-inducing strategies to scare us off. So it is important that we be realistic. The reality is that we simply cannot succeed unless we step off the beaten path. In terms of the physical, mental, and emotional bodies, this means becoming the observer.

Observing oneself is the only way to self-correct. When we are truly paying attention to our own actions, when we fully perceive our own part in events, then we see the folly in blaming others for our problems.

We concentrate on changing what we really can change: ourselves. This is tremendously empowering. It enables us to reclaim ourselves from the spell of others' opinions. Consideration of others is certainly essential to personal growth, but at the end of the day, the only person one is responsible to or for is oneself.

Through self-observation we learn to reflect on past action and recognize its consequence in present reaction. Because the two may be widely separated in time and circumstance, we don't usually see the connection. We treat repeated consequences fatalistically, as some inevitable reality, rather than as our own creation.

Those turbulent energy cycles, for instance, that arise between people in a relationship, are simply the reflection of the ego's desire for control. If, in your personal involvements with others, you are repeatedly hurt, angry, frustrated, or guilty, take the time to observe the dynamics on both sides of the equation. Understanding won't come overnight, but it will never come, and things will never change, without self-observation.

Fluid Isometrics and Block Therapy target frozen tissue, which is the ego's physical expression of its need to survive. Frozen tissue consists of compressed fascia; its greater density makes it more susceptible to gravity. This work teaches how to change the physical body. This has direct impact on the emotional and mental bodies.

Each step you take in the new direction carries you further from the old. This isn't about the destination; it is truly about the journey. As you begin to embrace your higher self, even for minutes a day, you nourish it. The days add up, and before long, something changes. It has to. You are on a different path.