

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELVES

by  
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**Consciousness is both the experience *and* the awareness of the different energies we experience in life. Out of experience and awareness, an aware ego emerges. This aware ego is not something static but is continuously in the process of becoming more and more aware.**

## Introduction

From the time I started to do breathwork, the technique fascinated me. Merely by using breath there was a great deal that I could accomplish for myself, and later in my work with clients as well. Nevertheless areas remained where I was unable to understand and explain why and how certain dynamics worked. This was especially true for the dynamics in relationships. Since our life is mainly relationship, in one form or another, I felt the need to find a frame of thought through which to understand the work I was doing on a deeper level. I also wanted tools to make its practice easier.

Because the universe seems to provide us with answers to questions that we put out, I was very lucky to meet Dr. Hal Stone and his wife Dr. Sidra Stone-Winkelman in 1981 in Amsterdam. They were there to introduce their ideas on the Psychology of Selves, and the Voice Dialogue technique that they had developed. After Hal's first lecture I felt so thrilled about the simplicity and brilliance of his ideas that I started to study with him and soon after that we – my working partner Hans Mensink and I – incorporated the "Psychology of Selves" into our training. Hans and I have been teaching together since 1979. Our "Institute for Holistic Integrative Breathwork" offers a three-year training program in which we train people in Breathwork, Voice Dialogue, Polarity work and NLP. This training enables the students to learn how to work with other people and to guide them through a deep process of personal growth.

The Psychology of Selves is a frame of thought that helps us to understand the human psyche better. Its essential idea is that the human psyche is composed of many parts or sub-personalities. The idea that the psyche consists of many different parts is not new. Freud, C.G.Jung, Moreno and Pearls, among others, each used this idea in their own specific way.

Hal & Sidra Stone however, took this concept and transformed it into a simple, easy and fun technique, which enables us to get into personal contact with our many different voices by talking directly to them. This happens in such a way that we not only experience these voices as lively parts of our personality, each with their own feelings, wishes, behaviour, and so forth, we also learn how to stay aware of these different energies or sub-personalities when they operate in our lives and in our relationships.

In the traditional meaning, the ego has always been seen as the decision-maker of the psyche. In the Voice Dialogue technique it becomes clear that what we refer to as 'ego' is often the ego being identified with a combination of sub-personalities. The concept of the "Aware Ego" as the Decision-Maker who gets his information both on an awareness level and on an experience level, is, however, unique. I will explain this later more precisely.

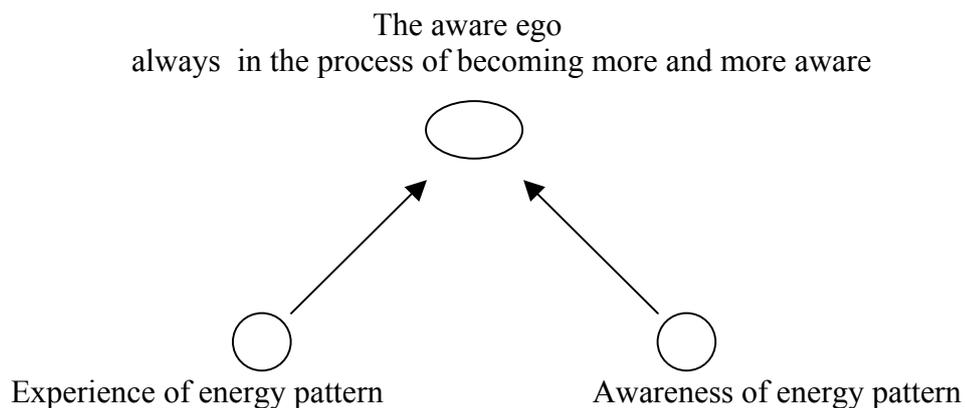
We found the Psychology of Selves to be an easily understandable frame of thought and the Voice Dialogue technique an ideal method to use alongside and in combination with breathwork. It proved to be the very clear and simple concept we were seeking to support us in our work on our own process and with our client's processes on an emotional, energetic and mental level.

## Consciousness and the “Aware Ego”

From Hal Stone I heard – maybe for the first time – an acceptable and workable concept of the word “Consciousness”. Many of us have used the word consciousness to describe what we experienced in meditation. I now think that awareness – meaning the capacity to witness – is a better word to describe that state. When, later, many of us became involved in all kinds of personal growth work like encounter, counselling and rebirthing, we were very much into pure experience, and then we called that “consciousness”. Hal brought these two, awareness and experience, together. I like to say it this way:

**Consciousness is both the experience *and* the awareness of the different energies we experience in life. Out of experience and awareness an aware ego emerges. This aware ego isn’t something static but is continuously in the process of becoming more and more aware.**

This process can be imaged like this:



### **Example**

*When I stand in front of an audience to give a lecture, I am distinctly aware of, and experience physically clearly, at least two very opposite energy patterns in myself. You could even call them “Voices” because they seem to be talking in my head.*

*One is the professional part of me that is able to address an audience and tell them something interesting. I call this my ‘Inner Teacher’. The other part is a very vulnerable and shy ‘Inner Child’, a small girl in me that is afraid when she sees so many strange faces and who would like to hide in a little corner with someone she knows well and trusts.*

*If I tried to give my lecture from the energy space of the “Inner Child”, I would not be able to talk at all because of her shyness. If I spoke through the other voice I would be identified with the voice of “The Teacher”, trying hard to get it right and probably creating a lot of resistance in my audience, because I would be too severe and not playful at all.*

*But if I could use the teacher **and** be aware of my Inner Child’s vulnerability I would be lively and authentic.*

I will explain the way, in which all our different parts come into existence how we can befriend them and learn to embrace them, and most importantly, how they influence our relationships.

## **The Psychology of Selves**

We can say that the soul chooses a body in order to learn certain lessons that can only be learned in the body. Imagine the immensity of the soul, with all its knowledge and its feeling of being connected with its origins, becoming trapped in a small baby's body. The soul's unique quality of being is like a psychic fingerprint, as Sidra Stone puts it <sup>1</sup>, carrying every special aspect of our being. It is the part of us that makes us undeniably unique.

In the womb we feel at one and as one with our mother. While our body grows, the soul gets "hooked" more and more onto the body. And then, during birth, we experience a deep sense of loss and separation. This is not only on account of our separation from our mother. Because the body is our only frame of reference and because we are very much identified with the vulnerability of the body, it is as if we 'forget' our connection with soul. Therefore we experience birth as separation from our source. This separation feels totally real and makes us feel very vulnerable. And in fact after birth we *are* vulnerable, we *can't* take care of ourselves and we *do* depend on others to be fed, cleansed and taken care of.

At birth we seem to forget our uniqueness and everything we planned to do here on earth because the enormous shock of the transition, the pain and this feeling of loss and separation are too overwhelming.

In order to become strong enough to survive, we have to develop the many parts of our personality that come into existence to protect our vulnerability. These different parts or, as I have called them before, "voices" may not be who we are deep inside but we need them because our need to protect our vulnerability is immense. We cannot simply be our unique self as little children. We have to develop a certain set of "Primary Selves" to make it possible for us to belong to our families, our religion and our country. We have to have a system of behaviour that allows us to "fit in". We need these Primary Selves that give us a measure of power to control our surroundings and to survive in this world. If we do not develop a certain power, we would be constant victims to everybody and to the circumstances of life.

Let's have a look at some of the voices that start to develop very early in life.

### **The System of Protection and Controlling**

The system that develops first is the part we call the "Protector-Controller". This part helps us to develop ways of controlling our surroundings. We cry when we are hungry or wet, and we learn very fast that people come to help us when we scream. As we become older this is the part that makes the rules. It tells us how to behave and how to fit into our family, society and even country. It makes us into more or less adapted people and it will always look for means to make us safe in the world.

#### ***For example***

*While we are still young, daydreaming may be a great way to escape from troublesome situations in our family. As a schoolboy or girl we may be scolded for the same behaviour because our teacher expects our continuous attention.*

The ways we behave are often based on past situations. They may sometimes seem impractical and even strange today but in the past they have been the best solutions we were able to come up with.

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<sup>1</sup> Hal & Sidra Stone, *The psychology of selves*, p. 13

**In fact we can look upon the Protector Controller as the head of a group of voices that are all protecting us. We call them the ‘Primary Selves’.**

These Primary Selves include:

### **The Protector**

My Protecting Voice will say things like this:

“You better watch out how you behave”.

“Be honest and nice, otherwise people will not like you and you might feel hurt”.

“Be strong, it doesn’t help to whine and complain”.

“Take care, that you earn enough money so you can live well and be respected”.

### **The Pleaser**

In the first weeks of our life a nice smiling, cooing little part starts to emerge. We call it “The Pleaser”. It notices that when it smiles, people around us are friendly and loving towards us. Later on it will say something like:

“I know how to tune into people and feel what they might need”.

“I want to be nice to others, then they are going to be nice to me”.

“I am happy when other people around me are happy and when I smile they will like to be with me, so I will feel loved and safe”.

This is a wonderful and very useful energy to have but if it starts to run our life it will make it very hard for us to sometimes say “No” to other people when we need to.

### **The Perfectionist**

This is the part that refines our way of dealing with life. It wants us to become better and better in everything we do. It hopes that if we become perfect, everybody will love us. The trouble with this voice is, no matter how hard we try, we will never be able to live up to its standards. Like many of the Primary Selves, it has learned from one or both our parents how they wanted us to become perfect as our parents are the role models for many of our Primary Selves.

“The Perfectionist” might say:

“You have to practice really hard so you learn how to speak that language properly, otherwise people won’t take you seriously”.

“When you dress up, you better get the tiniest details right. I like you to look just perfect”.

### **The Pusher**

In order to accomplish more and more, and to accomplish it even better in life we bring some nice pusher energy into our group of sub-personalities. My Pusher sounds like:

“ I want you to do this and that before you can relax”.

“You should get up earlier in the morning to accomplish everything that I have in mind for you.”

My pusher, often together with my perfectionist, is largely responsible for all the books I buy that are lying in high piles on my bedside table, waiting to be read!

If we didn’t have a bit of this pusher energy, we would hardly get anything done.

### **The Inner Critic**

All those times that our parents, or caretakers, are not totally content with our behaviour and tell us so, we start to confine our energy in order to conform to their moral and social standards. What we receive in the form of criticisms from the outside world, soon becomes

the stable foundation for a good strong “Inner Critic”. This Critic is always busy criticising us and telling us that we are not good enough the way we are, hoping that if he keeps getting at us, we won’t be criticised by others. Mostly I refer to the Critic as “he” because many people experience this energy as being male.

My own inner Critic e.g. warns me when I did something unfriendly, incorrectly or dishonest by giving me a very itchy feeling around my stomach. Even when what I did is just a tiny little bit ‘off track’ my inner Critic will give me a tiny little itch. In the past I just got upset about that feeling. Today I have learned to listen to it and use it as a perfect barometer.

Together these Primary Selves form the so-called front side of our personality. They want to see us happy, and to avoid that we are hurt physically or emotionally. They think that if we are good and perfect, nobody will hurt us.

**Because these ‘Primary Selves’ are so very important to us we need to honour them and not to try to get rid of them. They have been helping us throughout our lives, so they all have the right to exist. We should therefore not judge them. On the contrary, we should really consciously get to know them, learn about them and learn how to use them to our advantage.**

But what happens to that part in us that is connected to soul while growing up?

### **The lost Inner Child**

It seems that we are paying a price by developing the strong parts that form our personality. Our Primary Selves cause us to lose contact with our vulnerability. And our vulnerability is the part in us that is closest to our uniqueness, our Psychic Fingerprint. It is like a doorway to our soul and therefore to our creativity, our life force and our connection with God. Losing this contact in order to grow up is paying a high price indeed.

Our vulnerable child energy, which is extremely sensitive, enables us to be intimate with other people, and so it is very important for us to rediscover it in the course of the inner work we do with ourselves. The Primary Selves stand between us and our deeper contact with other people. Having our vulnerability and our Inner Child available to us enriches our relationships. It seems a paradox. We need our strong parts to get along in life but we also need to wake up to who we really are and stop just **being** our Primary Selves in order to be whole again.

We can easily imagine how different parts in a personality will be more developed than others in different families and cultures,

### **Example**

*In a very intellectual family it might be expected that in order to fit in, the children would develop a certain set of primary selves that helps them adjust and live well inside their family, such as: being intellectual, well-behaved, diligent, aiming for success, etc. But what will happen to the other side of their personality?*

This question brings us immediately to the opposite of the Primary Selves; the Disowned Selves. Let’s explore them.

## **The Disowned Selves**

Disowned Selves, or the less developed Selves –because they did not have the chance to develop- are the counterparts of the Primary Selves. They are a group of energies that have been kept away or repressed unconsciously because they did not fit into our family system. When we grow up and develop our power and responsibility on one side, then on the other side, there will be parts that are weak, scared, vulnerable, lazy, shy, etc.

This system obeys a law, which is;

**The degree to which we identify with the Primary Selves on one side is exactly  
the degree to which we will disown on the other side,  
the equal and opposite energy in an equal and opposite way.<sup>2</sup>**

This is the same as in physics. When you have an action on one side you get an equal reaction on the other side. This means, when we are very identified with power, our vulnerability will be proportionately disowned.

But also: If we are highly identified with being loving and caring, like the prototype of the good mother, that part in us that is more selfish and knows too well how to see to it that we take good care of ourselves will be disowned.

### **Example**

*Carla grew up in a very intellectual family where the emphasis was on becoming a strong, intelligent woman. She studied architecture and was rather successful at the technical side of her work. She could deal very well with the man on the construction site. But in the area of design she often felt blocked. And in her relationships it was difficult for her to become intimate with a partner. During her therapy we first explored the parts of her that were in control of her life. Then we started to make contact with her vulnerable child, a little girl who had often been hurt and who was never allowed to show people how shy she was. We also discovered a very magical little girl who liked to daydream and visualise all kinds of beautiful pictures and places, who was not allowed to be that way because; “one can use one’s time much better that that”. When she started to allow this energy to be more present in her daily life, she started to discover the designer side of herself, which gave her great pleasure and satisfaction.*

In the same intellectual family I mentioned before, it is very likely that there will be at least one child who will carry the so-called “Disowned Selves” for the rest of the family. This child will be the rebel. It might refuse to study, or to be tidy, or to be perfect, etc. It will develop the energies that are opposite to those that his family is used to and he will ‘carry’ them for the other members of the family.

In each of us there are disowned energies that were not useful in the family we grew up in. These are energies that – had we developed them – would have caused us to receive less love and appreciation than we needed in order to survive. In some of us this might have been the “Sensual Self”, or the “Intuitive Self”. Often our “Angry Part” will be disowned because few of us had the opportunity to express our anger freely as a child. But also archetypal Voices like our “Aphrodite”, our “Wise Man” or “Wise Woman”, our “Warrior” may be lost to us in our growing-up process.

**Most important, through our growing-up process our inner child who carries our sensitivity and intuition and who is the key to being intimate with others is lost to us.**

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<sup>2</sup> Hal Stone, *Tape on the Psychology of Selves*

***Some examples of how we can identify a 'Disowned Self'.***

*\*\*Imagine a man who is highly identified with being a responsible father, the provider for his family, a hard worker and very successful. He is the prototype of "The Responsible Father". This man may have a son who is the total opposite: irresponsible, lazy and rebellious. And... the father will hate his son for being that way! If the father could explore the parts of himself that are less compulsively responsible, and know how to relax and take it easy, his son would not as easily activate the "Responsible Father" part, and they would have fewer and less serious difficulties.*

*\*\*A mother who is very neat and formal may wonder how it is possible that she has got a daughter who is sloppy and busy seducing all the young boys in her High School. She will think that it is all her fault, and try even harder to do everything "right" and will be very surprised that all her efforts have the opposite effect, and push her daughter even more into the opposite energy. If she could make peace with the part within herself that sometimes longs to be free and seductive, she would not be so upset about her daughter, and her daughter might even have fewer tendencies to be so different from her mother.*

*\*\*A man who is spiritual, kind and sensitive with a very flowing energy, may find himself falling in love with a woman who is intellectual and strict. She will be withdrawn whereas he is open and vulnerable. Because they really love each other, they will not understand why they have arguments. They will wonder why they are so unhappy, not being able to see that they are caught up in opposite parts, both defending their positions and viewpoints. If he could develop his intellectual part some more, and she the part that is easy going their difficulties would be less.*

Each time we are strongly identified with a sub personality we feel righteous about our opinions because we don't have access to other points of view.

I am not saying that we should *become* these disowned parts. If we actually did, our Primary Selves might become very anxious. Becoming those parts would be like bouncing from one extreme into the other. Nor should we try to kill or get rid of parts we don't like very much in ourselves as well as in other people.

**We have to understand that when we try to get rid of some part in ourselves  
-or in someone else- it is one of our Primary Selves trying to get rid of  
the opposite side in us -or in the other person-.**

What we do need to do however is to get acquainted with our disowned energies to the degree that we experience them as true parts of ourselves. When we meet these opposites in other people in our normal daily life, it is a sure sign that we are meeting some unknown part of ourselves projected onto the other person. We seem to attract people who really carry our opposites for us. It is like a law: what we deny, we attract.

What's more, the best place to meet our Disowned Selves seems to be in our closest relationships. In that sense we can look at relationship as being a very important teacher.

***Example***

*This whole system of opposite energies that can get us into huge conflicts became very clear when at my working partner Hans Mensink and myself started working together. Hans had just come back from India, where he had visited Baghwan. He was spiritual and identified with freedom and with not being very conventional. He meditated a lot, did tarot readings, lived mainly with his guitar, and had hardly any money.*

*I was married with two children, living a seemingly stable life in a nice, big house. Although I had taken a training as a professional dancer I was still the rather conventional type.*

*We met and couldn't stand one another at first sight. But during our first conversation, which lasted, perhaps, for just half an hour, we discovered that we shared the same vision. We both were enthusiastic about breathwork and we wanted to create a thorough training for it that would take three years. We longed for breathwork to become an honoured way of working therapeutically, and to become socially acceptable. This shared vision brought us together and has been the driving force that helped us to solve every difficulty that we encountered in the time we have worked together.*

*That was twenty years ago. We really had to work hard to integrate many of our opposites in order to be able to work together as well as we are still doing today. In the beginning, we would often sit together for several hours to get our relationship straightened out after we had worked for a few hours. What I had to integrate inside myself -and not to judge in him- was the part of me that was more flowing, looser and less conventional. Hans had to learn that his conventional part was not as bad as he had thought. We also needed to learn to recognise in each other the signs that would tell us that the other felt vulnerable.*

When we feel vulnerable we tend to fall back into our well-known Primary Selves for protection and loose contact with our vulnerability. One could say that a conflict in relationship always comes about between a disowned part like a "Vulnerable Child" in one person, and a strong Primary Self like a "Severe Father" in the other person, and can be cleared through awareness of these energies.

To summon this up:

**The part that seems to upset or irritate you in your partner, is the part that needs to be integrated inside your self.**

**The part that seems to upset or irritate you in your partner, is the part where he/she needs help and is not easily able to ask for it.**

Now, let's get some taste for what these Disowned Selves inside us look and feel like.

### **Exercise**

**\*\*Who is it in your surroundings that you get angry at, that you cannot stand or that you feel irritated with a lot? What is the most striking quality in that person that 'sets you off'?**

Take the first answer that comes into your mind. And yes, that's what you are looking for, a nice Disowned Self.

**\*\*Who is it that you admire and/or overestimate a lot and whom you think of as being better than you are?**

Again take the first answer that comes to mind, and there you have found another Disowned Self.

It is rare, but it may happen, that having done a small exercise like this, we get a revelation, which makes it possible that we claim the disowned part on the spot and integrate it. But normally we will have to do some real work in order to get to know the disowned energy well enough to experience it as a part of us. Integration really means to reclaim a part that has been disowned as a real part of us. Then we have that energy available to us in our normal daily life.

If we suppress, disown certain energies very strongly over a longer period of time, our whole system will be affected by it. Energy is going to be expressed somewhere and in some way or another. This even may happen in the form of an illness.

The real work that has to be done is to rediscover our vulnerability. In reclaiming our vulnerability *and* in honouring our Primary Selves, we discover the real power that being in contact with vulnerability and source brings. The moment we are no longer identified with one side, whether it be the power side or the vulnerable side, we are on our way to develop a more aware ego. Then we have the Disowned Self *and* the original Primary Self available to us.

As long as we are identified with power, we are not really making a choice. It is more like power is choosing for us. As long as we are identified with vulnerability we don't have much choice either. In both cases we don't have any possibility of taking a different point of view. It simply is not available to us. What is disowned is disowned and therefore neither visible to, nor noticeable by us. But when we start to separate from our Primary Selves, or perhaps I could say, to get a conscious relationship with our Primary Selves, everything becomes different. When we integrate the disowned Selves then- as Hal Stone puts it- we have to carry the tension of opposites as well as the burden of choice.<sup>3</sup>

We have to embrace both sides and learn how to handle the different energies inside ourselves.

## Summary

\*As I already said before, the work is *not* just about *feeling* the different voices. It is about getting to know them and to appreciate them for what they are and what they do for us.

\*The work is about developing an aware ego that is in a continuous process of becoming more and more aware. Then we have more freedom of choice.

\*Through an aware ego *all* the parts are able to express themselves better and in a more congruent way. Even parts like our "Intuitive Self" or our "Spiritual Self" that we prefer to consider as "good" are better and more safely filtered through an aware ego.

### **Example**

*When we are identified with our spirituality and we let it come out through our power part then we are in danger of misusing our spirituality. We all know what can happen when people channel power through their spirituality while being identified with it. We get the worst type of guru-guru behaviour!*

\*All this leads to carrying more responsibility in the choices we have to make in life. The time is past where we can lean back in a so-called "faith in God" and just put our sense of responsibility into God's hand.

\*It means, we *really have to be able* to carry our responsibility for what we *have* to do here on this planet, the *way* we do it and, sometimes – even more importantly – for what we should *not* do.

\*When we have developed an aware ego we actually *can carry* that responsibility.

## Our way into Society

In groups of people that are devoted to personal growth we often see that the conventional part, the intellectual- or the business part in people seems to have been

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<sup>3</sup> Hal Stone. *Tape on the psychology of Selves*.

forgotten and replaced by a more flowing, intuitive and often caring and loving energy. Basically there is nothing wrong with that. It is just that by denying where we came from, we are as unbalanced as we were when we started out on our path of growth. Many of us have become so absorbed with our spiritual path that we tended to forget that we had a conventional part to begin with. The real consciousness process is about rediscovering the disowned parts, loving and honouring them and bringing them back into our lives so we can use them appropriately.

The moment we want to bring Breathwork into society and give it the place it deserves, we have to know how to carry the energies that are required in, and by our society. We can't hope to be received on a management level if we are not really befriended with the kind of energy that is called for on that level.

Our "Conventional Self" is like a good old-fashioned energy that is conventional, well-groomed, well-behaved, and has a stable knowledge and understanding of our work, its theory and practice, etc. This does not mean that we have to throw away our intuition, our sensitivity or our caring heart. It's just the opposite. We take our "Intuitive Part" and we add our "Conventional Part" and use them both together, so that we will be received in society as honoured guests who have something of importance to contribute in an intelligent and loving way.

When we integrate our conventional part and come well prepared to make the move to bring Breathwork into society, our conventional part will be satisfied and happy and our Inner child will feel safe. When we prepare ourselves thoroughly there is less chance that people in society will judge us or be embarrassed by us. This will lessen the chance that we get hurt. Then we really honour and take good care of both sides inside ourselves.

## **TILKE PLATTEEL-DEUR**

### **About the Author**

Since 1979, Tilke Platteel-Deur has been practicing and teaching Breathwork, Voice Dialogue, NLP and the dynamics of relationship, in Holland, Germany, France and Spain. She has long-standing experience in both individual and group work as breathwork therapist, coach, supervisor and trainer. She studied the Psychology of Selves with Hal and Sidra Stone, NLP, Family Constellations, Polarity Therapy and Massage. She is an Avatar Master. Her main focus is teaching a heart centred approach in therapy based on respect, trust and love. Integrating spirituality into daily life has always been of major interest to her. She co-founded and co-leads the Institute for Integrative Breath Therapy. ("Das Institut für Ganzheitliche Integrative Atemtherapie" ® registered in Europe), which offers a three-year training program for breathwork therapists with an optional year learn about group dynamics and being a trainer. She wrote several articles on Breathwork and the Psychology of Selves among which Hot Water Breathwork and Cold Water Breathwork, published in The Healing Breath journal and Atman journal.

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